

Sunday, February 16, 1986

The sun adds golden highlights to Monte Cristo, in a photo taken by Chris Noble for his first book.



WASATCH

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he is looking for," says a friend who occasionally skis for Noble's camera. "He also seems to know exactly what the editors of various publications want. He doesn't waste time out there."

Unlike many other photographers, Noble doesn't have a darkroom. He doesn't need to make his own prints. "Most of the publications I've written for only need color slides anyway," he says. "And no one can develop Kodachrome but Kodak."

Because he's "paid his dues," Noble's talent is recognized. He no longer writes and takes photos on speculation. "I figure if the editors don't want to pay me up front to go to Alaska or wherever, they aren't really interested in publishing the article anyway," he says.

And as his talent becomes more recognized, Noble is branching out. He takes photos of river running, now. And sea kayaking. Both are sports he's just learning. He has to learn them because he is writing about and photographing them.

He has also begun taking wildlife photos. In Katmai National Park on the Alaskan Peninsula, Noble did what he considers to be some of his most important work. "The landscape is very subtle there," he says. "It lacks the drama of, say, the Alaskan Range." In this park, the last large sanctuary for the Alaskan brown bear, Noble found 10 or 12 bears together, at a river, feeding on salmon. He captured them on film.

Does wildlife photography seem more dangerous than adventure photography? "Not at all," says Noble. "Ski models are much less predictable than bears."

He talks about the time, in Germany, when he positioned himself under a cornice of snow to catch a skier as he came over the edge. Catch him on film, that is. But unfortunately Noble caught him quite literally.

Neither was hurt when the skier landed on him. "He didn't speak much English and I didn't speak much German. I guess I thought I was communicating where I wanted him to land," says Noble. "But he didn't quite get it."

From Germany to Alaska — sometimes it seems Noble is everywhere at once. A recent issue of Powder magazine carried two articles written and photographed by Chris Noble. One was an evaluation of the newest mountaineering skis, boots, and bindings. The other was a guide to hut-to-hut skiing in North America. (He writes: *Tonight for the first time in weeks, I find myself in a shelter large enough to stand erect and warm enough so I can write these words sprawled on a bench, rather than huddled in a sleeping bag, puffing on fingers stiff with cold.*)

Noble travels a lot. He does four



Chris Noble takes photos from a sports

major projects a year — either photographing or writing or both. Noble is gone from his Salt Lake home for months at a time. He just completed a guide to outdoor adventure in Alaska that he researched on three separate trips. The article will appear in June in Outside magazine.

His photos and articles have appeared in Outside, Backpacker, Powder and Geo magazines. Noble has written, also, an apocryphal-sounding story about a mountain-climber named John Slater. The story appears in a book called "Ascent: The Mountaineering Experience in Word and Image," published by the Sierra Club. It is a modern fairy tale about a climber who was lured to his death (or nearly) by a mysterious, ghostly woman. Perhaps because of the days and weeks he has spent in the wilderness, Noble believes in things not easily explained. Truth is in the eye of the beholder. He writes:

"I have found that when a man speaks what he thinks is the truth — and there are all kinds of truth — you can read the pain or the joy of it in his face as he speaks. A liar speaks right to you, because he is always measuring the weight of his words as he goes, but a man telling what he believes looks through you because he is seeing the thing itself and not merely its effect upon his audience."

Like the mountain climber John Slater, Noble is a man telling what he

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